

## The Apostle of Beauty in Nova Scotia.

### OSCAR WILDE AT AMHERST.

The afternoon train from St. John on Friday, brought beauty's latest evangel to our province. He came, not surrounded by a halo of blue and purple glory, not in a carved car, nor in a Greek urn. He rode on the engine. He saw the little hills rejoicing merrily. He saw Moncton, and noticed the iridescent wonder of the "Transcript" editor. He took in the pre-Raphaelism of Dorchester. He rejoiced at the preciousness of Westcock, and was enraptured at the gaudy leonine beauty of the Tantramar. Oscar praised the railroad and liked the appointment of the cars. He smoked the cigar of peace as he crossed the Missiquash, but he took no interest in Fort Cumberland, as the battles fought there were not fought for love of beauty but for love of territory.

At Amherst he shook hands with the engine driver, gaily wished him a good day, gave him a stray cigar, and leaped lightly to the platform, declining the proffered help of a hand kindly outstretched to assist him. The station platform was crowded with citizens, trying to get a glimpse of "wild Oscar," as they called him, and these were anxiously watching the door of the car where the Evangelist might be supposed to be, while he was quietly getting into a carriage and getting under way for Lamy's. The first impression on looking at Oscar is that he looks like his pictures. You have seen that picture before and are ready to turn over a leaf.

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A HERALD representative called upon Mr. Wilde in his room at Lamy's. He was received with a polite friendliness that was winning. The Apostle had no lily nor yet a sun flower. He wore a velvet jacket which seemed to be a good jacket. He had an ordinary neck-tie and wore a linen collar about number eighteen on a neck half a dozen sizes smaller. His legs were in trousers such as Greenfield might have made, and his boots were apparently the product of New York art, judging by their pointed toes. He wore a ring with a seal of great size. A consensus of the opinions of Amherst people decides that Oscar's hair is not good. It is the color of straw, slightly leonine, and straight as an Indian's. It is faded and bleached looking, and when not looked after goes climbing all over his features. Mr. Wilde was communicative and genial. He said that he found Canada pleasant. He liked the scenery of New Brunswick, as it lent itself readily to art. There were no towering mountains, and deep gulches such as he had seen in the West. There were no large rivers, but the scenery was always changing as one passed through. Every turn in the road brought a small surprise. The streams wound attractively through the land, and there were innumerable hills and valleys of all conceivable forms.

Had our autumn forests finer colors than those in England?

Well, he would not say that. Our timber was finer, but its beauty was of a different sort.

Mr. Wilde uses the word "timber" in a sense that he thinks American. He talks about the leaves on our timber, etc.

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"The editor of a paper," said Oscar, "has an advantage over all other writers. He never waits for his audience, and he is sure that what he writes will be read."

(Oscar sighed here, doubtless thinking of his poems.)

"American journals are in many respects better than the English. I think the American newspaper is the journal of the future. It is filled with news. The reader of the large New York papers knows everything that goes on in the world that is worth knowing, and much more. Still there is a want of dignity, and an amount of scurrility in the American news-paper which one gets in smaller towns that is terrible."

"Did they not discuss your appearance and your lectures in a somewhat unsatisfactory wa

Oscar at this stage had brought in to him a cup of tea and having asked your representative to partake with him he laughed quietly and pushed his hair behind his ears, as he replied: "They talk in an incredible obtuse manner about my message and my work. I think nothing whatever about the criticisms now. It does not interest me as it did at first. I understand the people who say those things about me and I cannot bring myself to care what they say. I cannot possibly do it. At first it surprised me. I came out here, never having spoken in public, in earnest about my message, strongly feeling what I was saying, and I talked seriously to those people. They heard me and went away and talked about my necktie and the way I wore my hair. I could not understand how people could do such a thing. I thought it inexpressibly stupid."

This last with a sigh and a look of half-wearied pity at the thought of these critics. He said "stupid" with a strong accentuation on the last syllable.

"The English Journals," he went on, "are much more serious and earnest in their tone than yours. But a man who has a name that is valuable will not be an English journalist. English newspaper articles are written anonymously. A good writer can get no credit for good work, and so will not write for an English paper. The proprietor is everything, the writer nothing there. In France, where the writers sign their names, better men become journalists."

"But as a matter of fact you can tell who writes many articles in England."

"Yes, in some cases you can. There is George Augustus Sala. (This name was uttered with a weary look as if the physical effort of articulating it was nearly too much and the last syllable of Sala was clearly accented.) You can always tell what Sala writes. No other human being can write such intolerable English."

Oscar made enquiries about the institutions of Amherst.

"Do you tell me that it has only three thousand inhabitants? Why (lying back luxuriously on his bear skin rug and sipping his tea,) I never spoke in a town so small as that, Mr Townshend has driven me about the village and I consider it a beautiful little place."

He spoke of our style of Government, of democracies generally, of sociology, of Herbert Spencer, whom he had read and admired greatly. He [found nothing in his work or in any other work on evolution which differed from Plato and Aristotle."

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There is nothing in art or philosophy in which we are as wise as the Greeks. Spencer has prosecuted enquiries which have led him to verify the Greek philosopher. No, we should not go back to the Greek, we should try to get up to the Greek. All that remains for us anywhere is to corroborate the Greeks in everything. They reached a level, the summit of which we cannot yet see. True, they had simpler problems. Their common people were less stupid. It is a wonder we do not have twice the trouble we do have, with the elements that go to make up the countries we now live in. Our conceptions of beauty may reach the Greek conception some time. There is nothing higher to hope for."

"Yes, I have found America pleasant. Out in the West, delightful. At Denver I met the most interesting people I have ever seen."

"Rough and ready I suppose?"

"Ready, but not rough. They were polished and refined compared with the people I met in large cities farther East. Yes, I did see the common people. I spent a night in a silver mine. I dined with the men down there. They were great, strong, well formed men, of graceful attitude and free motion. Poems every one of them. A complete democracy under ground. I find people less rough and coarse in such places. There is no chance for roughness. The revolver is their

book of etiquette. This teaches lessons that are not forgotten. I wish I could have gone to Winnipeg. I like free people without the resources of civilization. They are freer and more artistic in their surroundings because they follow nature."

Speaking of ladies (he had spoken of them) do you consider American or European ladies the finest looking?

"That I cannot answer here I shall wait till I get in mid-ocean, out of sight of both countries. If I were to answer you I should find it to my advantage to be anything but candid."

Your reporter intimated that the last remark was a sufficient answer.

Oscar, smiling and drinking more tea, proceeded: "Your women are pretty. I never saw so many pretty women as I have seen here, especially in the South but the prettiness is in color and freshness and bloom. A truly beautiful woman never grows old. The most of your pretty ladies will not be pretty in ten years."

"I believe you discovered Mrs. Langtry?"

A look of rapture came to Oscar's face. He flung his locks from where they clustered around his nose, and with a gesture, the first of the interview, he said:

"I would rather have discovered Mrs. Langtry than have discovered America. Her beauty is in outline perfectly moulded. She will be a beauty at eighty-five."

"Yes, it was for such ladies that Troy was destroyed, and well might Troy be destroyed for such a woman. Perhaps it may be true—they say it is—that the seige of Troy was brought about by a quarrel about a harbor, but they thought they fought for a woman; they had the conception that it was for beauty, and that is the same as if it was. It

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This last was spoken in a tone of injured susceptibility, as though York had thrown soup on Oscar's coat, or Lancaster had smoked a black pipe over Oscar's dinner.

"What do I think of your American Literature? I think you have had a great poet in Poe. He is your greatest poet. His sense of form and exquisiteness of touch are intense. His mind is not so broad and

sense of form and exquisiteness of touch are intense. His gold is not to be gilt and his lilies are unpaintable. Joaquin Miller is also a beautiful poet. "Arizonian" is a poem of great artistic excellence. Fawcet, a new poet, whom we had not heard of when I left England, has written some of the most perfect poetry which I have seen. Walt Whitman if not a poet is a man who sounds a strong note. He writes neither prose nor poetry but something of his own that is unique. He is one of your greatest men."

"No I do not care for the Commemoration ode of Lowell. It has no harmony in its conception. It is oratory of the strongest kind, and is eloquent but does not meet my idea of poetry. Lowell has written a poem on dedication which is delicate poetry. You must like it. You have poets with you. In New Brunswick a young man, Mr Roberts has published a little book. You have heard of it."

The reporter had read Robert's published poems and was delighted to find that Mr. Wilde met and liked them.

And Mulvany of Toronto, a countryman of my own, a man once well known at Trinity College. He is a man of taste. Frechette, I believe is however your best poet."

"Wordsworth was undoubtedly a poet. I do not read the poems he liked best of his. I do not care for his "Idiot Boy," "The Excursion," is nothing to me."

Your correspondent intimated that the poem was too long for what poetry it contained which reduced the average too low.

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Said Mr. Wilde, "I do not like to hear poems spoken of as too long. 'The Excursion' is shorter than the Iliad I would not have one line less in the Iliad. But I like Wordsworth's Sonnets. That begining: 'Milton thou shouldst be living at this hour,' is fine, as is that which commences:

"The world is too much with us."

As your representative rose to go, having declined a cup of tea, which was again politely offered, he was asked about Halifax, the nature of the people and the style of the town. Mr. Wilde had met Sir John Mac- Donald and his lady. "Sir John, (and Mr. Wilde sighed as he said it,) was a man of the world, but his lady was charming and so was he."

And your correspondent left. There wa<sup>s</sup> other talk about the classics, about the French idea of the Dramatic Unities, about Shakespere and Wordsworth and Keats and Rossette, but this was of a nature too confidential to be communicated to everybody. It will be remembered that Mr. Wilde begins one of his sonnets with this line;

"I stood by the unvintageable sea."

Your correspondent thought of this as he was leaving, and remembering that the Tantramar was very muddy as the œsthetie passed over it, he asked, "Do you consider the Tantramar vintageable to any extent?" The apostle laughed gaily at this proof of the presence of a Philistine, but contented himself with praising other streams of less leonine beauty.

It may be said here that Mr. Bigelow deserves the greatest credit for his enterprise and daring in bringing so high priced a man to a small town like Amherst. Mr. Wilde had never spoken in so small a place before. He had a good house and a good hearing: